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And can it be:

Analyzing the Words, Music, and Contexts of an Iconic Methodist Hymn

Martin V. Clarke

A key part of the annual British Methodist Conference is an act of worship that includes the Reception of Presbyters and Deacons into Full Connexion. This is a significant occasion that marks the end of their probationary period and typically precedes their ordination, which customarily takes place later on the same day. At the 2015 meeting of the conference in Southport, the act of worship included hymnody that was greatly varied in terms of its date and place of composition, and musical and literary style. Among the many hymns and songs sung was a single text by Charles Wesley, *And can it be that I should gain*, set to Thomas Campbell's tune SAGINA. This was the oldest hymn sung during the service and, together with *To God be the glory*, was clearly intended to represent traditional Methodist hymnody alongside contemporary songs, music from the world church, and the Taizé Community. Within the service, which was streamed live, *And can it be* occupied a pivotal place, sung immediately after all the persons being received into full connexion had been greeted by the president of the conference. As the video stream focused on the ordinands on the conference hall stage, it was clear that the majority were singing heartily and from memory, and as the view shifted to the large congregation in the main body of the hall toward the end of the hymn, there was ample evidence of gestural responses such as raised arms and outstretched hands. Such gestures, though widely reported in accounts of eighteenth-century Methodism and nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist worship, are now more commonly associated with the use of contemporary music in charismatic worship.

That *And can it be* had been chosen for this point in this particular act of worship and that it provoked these reactions is both noteworthy and yet unsurprising. On the one hand, the gestural responses it elicited are more commonly associated with contemporary worship music than with eighteenth-century words set to a nineteenth-century tune. On the other hand, however, the use and reactions both testify to the iconic status this hymn has within British Methodism. Closely associated with the conversion experiences of both Charles and John Wesley, its text is infused with messages of mercy, grace, salvation, and assurance, and its bold conclusion confidently expresses the joy of Christian faith and the promise of eternal life with Christ. In its association with SAGINA, it invites the hearty congregational singing that has been so closely associated with Methodist worship throughout the denomination's history. The hymn's use and the reactions noted above illustrate both its status within the denomination as a whole and the spiritual significance it has for many individual Methodists.¹

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the increase in ecumenical interest and activity in Britain has further strengthened the popular ecumenical perception of hymnody as central to

¹ As well as this example of its use at a national level, *And can it be* was included in the service of induction for the Chair of the Darlington District of the Methodist Church, held in Durham Cathedral in 2008. At a more localized level, it was the concluding hymn at a centennial service of celebration at Elvet Methodist Church, Durham, in 2003.

Methodism's identity and a significant contribution that the denomination brings to collaborative work; *And can it be* has accordingly entered into a wide range of hymnals associated with different denominations. It is also one of a select number of hymns that have achieved an iconic status in contemporary Methodism; the texts committee of the denomination's current authorized hymnal, *Singing the Faith*, which pursued a rigorous program of textual revision and modernization, took the decision that the text of *And can it be* should not be subjected to this process on the grounds of the special place it has in the spiritual lives of many Methodists.²

This article interrogates the basis of this iconic status through an examination of the hymn's words, music, and contexts. It traces the origins of the text and analyzes its content, structure, and literary and scriptural allusions. It also explores its significance in terms of the Wesley brothers' own religious experiences and assesses the impact of this on its later popularity. The article analyzes the hymn's various musical settings throughout its history in British Methodism, along with its adoption by other British denominations and internationally. It argues that none of these factors alone explains the hymn's status, but that its significance lies in the relationships between words, music, historical and religious context, and performance. In its focus on these interactions in relation to a single hymn, the article does not seek to impose the particular conclusions on the general importance of hymnody in Methodism or more broadly. Rather, it seeks to offer a methodology for analyzing hymns and understanding the specific relationship between them and the religious traditions in which they are used and valued.

The Text³

Commentators are united in their admiration for Charles Wesley's text in terms of its narrative structure, theological content, scriptural allusion, and literary quality; the comment in Watson and Trickett's *Companion to Hymns & Psalms* that "the hymn is an extraordinary and daring tour-de-force, both poetically and theologically" is indicative.⁴

Part of the special value given to *And can it be* lies in its close association with the conversion experiences of Charles and John Wesley in May 1738. It was written very soon after these events, along with the hymn *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* Based on the evidence of Charles Wesley's journal for May 23–24, 1738, the latter is widely accepted as the hymn written in the days between his experience on May 21 and his brother's just three days later.⁵ Both hymns are in the same meter and share some literary characteristics, such as the prominent use of questions leading to the assurance of salvation. J. R. Watson observes essential similarities in both hymns, describing *And can it be* as

another attempt, using the same kind of literary medium of rhetorical questioning, to find language for the great experience. So every attempt is a new beginning, and every hymn is, in T.S. Eliot's words, a different

² *Singing the Faith* (London: Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., 2011).

³ Charles Wesley, "And can it be that I should gain," *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cswt/01_Hymns_and_Sacred_Poems_%281739%29_CW_Verse.pdf, 53 (accessed Aug. 18, 2015).

⁴ Richard Watson and Kenneth Trickett, eds., *Companion to Hymns & Psalms* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 152.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 400.

kind of failure. The “And” at the beginning of the first line may be an indicator of this: it suggests a continuation of the grace that had given rise to the first hymn, and also a continuation or development of that hymn.⁶

Despite both being retained in authorized British Methodist hymnals through to the present day, the popularity of *And can it be* far surpasses that of *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* The reasons for this are partly related to the general popularity of *And can it be* and concern the interaction of text, music, and performance, which will be explored later. However, the nature of the texts may also contribute to the relative popularity of these two hymns. Although both have a first-person emphasis, *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* turns outward in its final verses, with appeals to “Harlots, and publicans, and thieves” in verse 5, and, more generally to “my guilty brethren” in the final verse; the hymn concludes with the exhortation “He calls you now, invites you home: Come, O my guilty brethren, come!” Significantly, *And can it be* retains its first-person focus throughout, from the opening line to the final, exultant couplet “Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.” Furthermore, while *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* ends with an evangelistic exhortation, which is very clearly situated in the present reality of the people it addresses, *And can it be*, by contrast, extends the narrative of salvation toward its ultimate fulfillment in heaven, expressed in the ecstatic joy of the final verse. Timothy Dudley-Smith captures this aspect of the hymn as he notes that “few hymns enable the singer to share in the author’s wonder and thankfulness as deeply as this.”⁷

The sense of wonderment apparent from the very opening of the hymn is central to the text’s ability to make a powerful impression upon those who sing, hear, or read it. That it takes Wesley a full three verses to express his amazement that God’s mercy expressed in the gift of salvation “found out me” highlights its magnitude, while the detailed exploration of the significance of Jesus’s death is memorably summed up in the line “Emptied himself of all but love,” described as “the condensation of the whole kenosis doctrine into a single line.”⁸ After these three verses, the impact of the liberation from sin described in verse 4 is made all the more powerful, as its meaning for the individual believer has been so deeply considered by this point. Dudley-Smith sums up the power of the hymn’s narrative of salvation and its relationship to the structure:

After the opening lines of the earlier verses, questioning, declaring, confessing, attesting, the metre comes into its own in the glorious affirmation of the final verse. So skilfully has the hymn prepared us, that what emerges is not presumption but assurance, humbly but confidently based not simply on the writer’s “feeling” or the “inward Voice” (of the original verse 5) but on the promises of God.⁹

Originally, *And can it be* had six verses; the original fifth verse was omitted in *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists* (1780), and the resulting five-verse form has remained standard ever since. Its omission heightens the climax of the hymn, as the newly

⁶ J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 223.

⁷ Timothy Dudley-Smith, “And can it be that I should gain,” in *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/a/and-can-it-be-that-i-should-gain> (accessed July 16, 2015).

⁸ *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7: *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 323.

⁹ Dudley-Smith, “And can it be.”

redeemed believer moves quickly from the release from sin in verse 4 to the assurance that “No condemnation now I dread” in verse 5.¹⁰

The hymn’s meter, six lines of eight syllables each, is one of Wesley’s most characteristic, and the particular way in which he employs it in this text is a further reason for the powerful effect the hymn has had on many Methodists. In common with his general approach to this meter, he creates a rhyming couplet at the end of each verse, utilizing a new rhyme; the rhyme scheme throughout is ABABCC.¹¹ This heightens the sense of expectancy as each verse moves toward its conclusion, an effect that is enhanced by the declamations at the start of this couplet in the first two verses. In the first verse, after a series of four searching questions, the fifth line begins with the exclamation “Amazing love!” while the second verse follows a further question and contemplation of the paradox “the Immortal dies” with the assertion that “’Tis mercy all!” The third verse has a similar effect, with “’Tis mercy all” used again, though this time lacking the exclamation of the previous verse. Similarly, in verse 4, the phrase “My chains fell off,” although not followed by an exclamation mark, has a powerful effect, as the first decisive action in that verse’s final couplet: “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.”

Only the final verse departs from this pattern with a line that includes all eight syllables in a single clause: “Bold I approach the eternal throne.”¹² However, the pattern has been sufficiently well established in the preceding verses for this inconsistency to seem inconsequential; the jubilation of the whole final verse makes up for the slight diminishing of the impact of the final couplet. Another facet of these final couplets is the simplicity of their language; with the exception of “amazing” in verse 1, none of the couplets contain words of more than two syllables. This accords with Frank Baker’s evaluation that “the basic texture of Wesley’s speech was provided by Anglo-Saxon, in which every now and then was woven a bright pattern of classical words.”¹³ The absence of such classical language here is noteworthy and further emphasizes the impact that these final couplets were intended to have. Again, Baker offers an explanation for this approach: “This economy in words was the result in part of training, in part of a purified taste, and in part of deliberate restraint for the purposes of evangelism.”¹⁴

The hymn draws heavily on the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of St. Paul, conforming to Kenneth D. Shields’s observation on Wesley’s use of the Bible that “commonly the phrases and imagery are drawn not from a single passage but from all over the Bible.”¹⁵ This “free use of biblical language,”¹⁶ rather than direct paraphrase or

¹⁰ *Works*, 7: 322–23.

¹¹ Baker notes that “The most prolific [metre] of all was his favourite form of six eights—8.8.8.8.8 8, rhyming ABABCC. In this metre he composed over eleven hundred poems, a total of nearly twenty-three thousand lines, most of them with a vigour, a flexibility, yet a disciplined compactness, that proved this to be the instrument fittest for his hand.” Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley’s Verse: An Introduction* (London: The Epworth Press, 1964), 70.

¹² The commonly omitted verse also departs from the pattern with the line “I feel the life His wounds impart.”

¹³ Baker, *Charles Wesley’s Verse*, 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Kenneth D. Shields, “Charles Wesley as Poet,” *Charles Wesley as Poet and Theologian*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992), 52. Watson and Trickett note a long series of scriptural reference: Verse 1: lines 1–2: Matthew 26:28; lines 3–6: Romans 5:6–8; Verse 2: lines 3–6: 1 Peter 1:12; Verse 3: lines 1–4: Philippians

imitation, is also customary, and though there is no attempt to retell a biblical story in the hymn, verse 4 clearly has its roots in the story of Peter's imprisonment and release, recounted in Acts 12:1–11. This simultaneous grounding in scriptural language and distancing from biblical narrative is another factor in the hymn's persuasiveness. The scriptural language gives it legitimacy far beyond the author's own convictions, yet the way in which this is enfolded within deeply personal language enables, or even demands, it to be interpreted in the light of the participant's own life, rather than looking back objectively to the apostolic age.

Commentators identify other literary allusions in the hymn, which are also typical of Charles Wesley's work. The third and fourth lines of verse 4 are commonly acknowledged to be derived from Alexander Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, while Timothy Dudley-Smith suggests that the "first-born seraph" is a reference to the seraph of light in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.¹⁷ Important though these references are in understanding Wesley's craftsmanship, education, and the influences upon him, they are not central to the impact the hymn has had within and beyond Methodism. For the literary-aware singer of Wesley's verse, the integration of these references into the hymn may add an extra layer of meaning, particularly in the case of the phrase derived from Pope, for, as Watson and Trickett note, "it is typical of Charles Wesley to take a declaration of human love and transform it into a statement of divine love."¹⁸ For such singers, being conscious of Wesley's conversion of secular words into sacred might also have served as a metaphor for the religious conversion the hymn describes. The transformation of secular love poetry into an expression of divine love undoubtedly makes a clear statement about the differences between human and divine nature that complements the hymn's message, but neither the meaning nor the significance of the words is diminished if these references are not registered by the singer; the text stands in its own right as a powerful statement of the nature of divine love and the gift of salvation.

The text, then, has its own significance in understanding this hymn's popularity and spiritual meaning. The integration of a powerfully personal message of salvation with a poetic structure that draws attention to the means by which this is offered and its effects, backed up by its historical connotation and diverse scriptural and other literary references, results in a compelling piece of poetry. However, Dudley-Smith suggests that the text alone is not a sufficient explanation of the hymn's popular status: "The hymn has become extremely popular with British Methodists, especially since its setting to the repeating tune SAGINA in MHB (1933)."¹⁹

Musical Settings

Despite its ubiquity in the collective memory of contemporary British Methodism, the association of *And can it be* with Thomas Campbell's SAGINA is neither straightforward nor, in terms of the denomination's authorized hymnals, as longstanding as might be assumed. Though

2:5–8, line 4: Romans 5:14, 1 Corinthians 15:22; lines 5–6: Psalm 85:7–10, Romans 5:15–18; Verse 5: line 1: Romans 8:1; line 3: Ephesians 4:15; line 4: Ephesians 6:14; line 5: Hebrews 4:16; line 6: 2 Timothy 4:8. Watson and Trickett, *Companion*, 151–52.

¹⁶ Shields, "Charles Wesley and Poet," 52.

¹⁷ Dudley-Smith, "And can it be."

¹⁸ Watson and Trickett, *Companion*, 152.

¹⁹ Dudley-Smith, "And can it be."

first published in 1825, SAGINA was not directly paired with *And can it be* in an authorized hymnal until *The Methodist Hymn Book* (1933), although it did appear in an appendix of supplementary tunes in *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal* (1889), with a cross-reference to the text, and, without text, in a collection of supplementary tunes appended to *The Methodist Hymn Book* (1904), the final authorized hymnal of the Wesleyan Connexion and Methodist New Connexion prior to Methodist union in 1932.²⁰ Prior to 1933, authorized hymnals reveal no consensus as to the most appropriate tune for this text, and even after SAGINA establishes itself in authorized hymnals as well as popular preference, compilers and editors have advocated alternative tunes, suggesting that SAGINA is not universally regarded as a wholly suitable or desirable musical setting for these words.

The lack of agreement prior to SAGINA's general acceptance and the apparent ongoing ambivalence of compilers toward Campbell's tune indicate the challenge of finding a convincing musical setting for Charles Wesley's text, and in particular the contrast between the humility of the first three verses and the transformative experience of salvation and assurance in the final two verses. As described earlier, this turn is crucial to the affective power of the text, yet its dramatic change of mood is difficult to reconcile with the need for a single musical setting to fit all verses.²¹ As will be discussed in more detail below, SAGINA is more readily suitable for the final two stanzas, its musical qualities engendering a sense of confidence and boldness. Settings provided as alternatives to it have tended to attempt a more nuanced musical reading of the text as a whole.

John Wesley's Selection of Tunes

And can it be is one of the 42 hymns set to music in the earliest collection of tunes associated with Methodism, *A Collection of Tunes*, where it is set to a tune named CRUCIFIXION, composed by Samuel Ackeroyd, which had first appeared in Playford's *The Divine Companion* (Ex. 1).²² Although there is no direct reference to the hymn in either of the music collections issued under John Wesley's authority for use across the Connexion, *Sacred Melody* or *Sacred Harmony*, the 1786 edition of *A Collection of Hymns*, in which a tune name was specified for every hymn, indicates that it should be sung to BIRMINGHAM, a tune found in both *Sacred Melody* and *Sacred Harmony*, and which was first published in *Harmonia-Sacra* and *Divine Musical Miscellany* in 1754.²³

²⁰ *The Methodist Hymn Book* (London: Methodist Conference Office, 1933); *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1889); *The Methodist Hymn Book* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1904).

²¹ While settings that employ different tunes for different verses of the same hymn exist, they tend to be primarily driven by the practical necessities of meter, such as in Stanford's setting of *I bind unto myself today*. Examples from eighteenth-century Methodism are confined to the set-piece anthems included in Methodist hymnals in the latter part of the century. There is no evidence to suggest that this practice was ever intended or realized with metrically regular texts like *And can it be*.

²² *A Collection of Tunes, Set to Music, as they are commonly sung at the Foundery* (London: A. Pearson, 1742); Henry Playford, *The Divine Companion: being a collection of new and easie hymns and anthems* (London: William Pearson, 1701).

²³ *Sacred Melody, or A Choice Collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes* ([London]: [], [ca.1765]); *Sacred Harmony, or a Choice Collection of Psalms and Hymns* ([London?]: [John Wesley], [1781]); *Harmonia-Sacra, or A*

Example 1: CRUCIFIXION [audio Example 1 on journal website's page for this article]

And can it be that I should gain

5 An Int' - rest in the Sav - iour's Blood!

9 Dy'd he for me? - who caus'd his Pain!

13 For me? - who him to Death pur - su'd.

18 A - ma - zing Love! how can it be,

22 That thou, my God, shouldst die for me.

Both tunes are typical of a type that featured prominently in the hymn tune collections issued under John Wesley's authority in eighteenth-century Methodism. They are melodically focused tunes, with decorative melismatic writing and simple implied, or in the case of *Sacred Harmony*, realized harmony. They clearly reflect Wesley's own preference for fashionable art music.²⁴ However, they differ from each other in one important aspect, which already hints at the variety of possible musical responses to this text: CRUCIFIXION is in G major, while BIRMINGHAM is in A minor. Given the nature of hymn tune publishing in the eighteenth century, it would be wrong to read too much significance into the choice of these tunes. The number of tunes published in the various eighteenth-century Methodist collections was significantly lower than the number of texts contained in the various books and pamphlets issued; Wesley's annotation of the 1786

Choice Collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes (London: Thomas Butts, [1754]); *The Divine Musical Miscellany* (London: Wm. Smith, [1754]).

²⁴ The inclusion of melodies adapted from Handel and other contemporary composers and newly composed by John Frederick Lampe (1703–51), a theater composer and Methodist convert, in the collections Wesley oversaw demonstrates his preference for fashionable art music. However, he was sometimes critical of local adoption of secular melodies, especially when they inhibited full congregational participation. For further discussion, see Nicholas Temperley, "John Wesley, Music, and the People Called Methodists," *Music and the Wesleys*, ed. Nicholas Temperley and Stephen Banfield (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 3–25.

edition of *A Collection of Hymns* must have tempered idealism with pragmatism in matching over 500 texts to just over 100 tunes.²⁵ Furthermore, these were pre-existing tunes, not written with this particular text in mind. While both are basically adequate for the text, it is unsurprising that neither association has endured. The modulation and strong cadence in the third phrase of CRUCIFIXION are not an ideal fit for the structure of Wesley's verse, while the extensive melismatic writing of BIRMINGHAM makes it a challenging tune to learn in a congregational setting (Ex. 2).

Example 2: BIRMINGHAM [audio Example 2 on journal website's page for this article]

And can it be that I should gain An
 5 int - erest in the sav - iour's blood? Died he for
 9 me, who caused his pain? For me, who him
 13 to death pur - sued? A - maz - ing love! How can
 17 it be that thou my God shouldst die for me? That thou,
 22 that thou, that thou my God shouldst die for me?

SAGINA

First published in Thomas Campbell's *The Bouquet*, SAGINA is a clear example of a style of tune that became prevalent in Methodism in the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁶ The style is commonly described as "Old Methodist," a term first used and explained by Percy Scholes:

²⁵ While BIRMINGHAM was set for only two hymns, others were specified many more times, such as AMSTERDAM, which Wesley recommended for 19 hymns.

²⁶ Thomas Campbell, *The Bouquet: A Collection of Tunes Composed and Adapted to Wesley's Hymns* (London: T. Blanshard, [1825]).

Many of the Methodist tunes of that [the eighteenth] century and the early years of the following one are extremely florid; others are of a “fugueing” type, but not to the extent of obscuring the words; no doubt the popularity of Handel’s choruses was reflected in this type of tune. The last line of the words was often repeated in such a way as to be taken up by the men and women in succession and then by both together.²⁷

The Bouquet is also typical of the many, often small, collections of original hymn tunes by a single composer in the early nineteenth century. It contains 23 tunes, 11 of which are set to texts by Charles Wesley, six to texts by Isaac Watts, two to translations of German hymns by John Wesley, and one each to texts by Thomas Ken, Joseph Addison, and William Cowper, with one anonymous Christmas text. All 23 tunes are given Latin botanical names; there is no apparent reason for this, and no connection between the names and the musical qualities of the tunes can be established. Campbell is an otherwise entirely anonymous figure, so there are no biographical clues as to why he chose these names.

Significantly, *And can it be* does not feature in the collection, and SAGINA is set to *Thee will I love, my strength, my tow’r*, a translation by John Wesley of a hymn by Johann Scheffler. Its eventual association with *And can it be* will be explored below, but it is salutary to note that, although the bond between SAGINA and *And can it be* is presumed to be unbreakable, the tune was not composed with these words in mind. Furthermore, there are several notable differences in melody, harmony, and the relationship between the four voice parts between Campbell’s original composition and the version universally printed in later hymnals.

The tunes in *The Bouquet* are all set in open score for four voices, laid out in the tenor-alto-soprano-bass (TASB) format common at the time. The principal melody is on the third stave, in the treble register, but printed immediately above the bass stave for the ease of keyboard players. The tenor and alto parts on the upper two staves were intended to be sung an octave lower than printed. This had become the standard layout in collections such as this in the early nineteenth century, though, as Sally Drage points out, it was not universally adopted, and the musical qualities of these hymn tunes could be a source of confusion:

By the end of the [eighteenth] century, it was more common for the air to be placed conventionally in the treble, although it was usually still printed just above the bass for the convenience of keyboard players, with the tenor on the top line in a TASB layout. Some examples also exist with the alto instead of the tenor placed at the top in an ATSB layout, so, not surprisingly, there was some confusion unless the air and part allocations were clearly marked, especially as nonconformist composers often wrote equally melodious soprano and tenor parts creating duet passages in thirds and sixths, and either part might be considered to be the air.²⁸

Campbell’s original version of SAGINA displays the melodic part writing to which Drage refers, and, in its sixth phrase, the principal melody moves to the tenor part, before all four parts contribute to a polyphonic texture as lines 5 and 6 are repeated in an extended musical

²⁷ Percy A. Scholes, “Methodism and Music,” *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 10th ed., ed. John Owen Ward (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 631. The term is also discussed in Nicholas Temperley, “Methodist Church Music,” *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/47533> (accessed July 16, 2015).

²⁸ Sally Drage, “John Fawcett of Bolton: The Changing Face of Psalmody,” in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 61.

setting. As such, and in common with the popular type of tune to which it belongs, part of its appeal was solely musical. Unlike a purely homophonic setting, it offers singers accustomed to part singing the opportunity to sing lines with greater independence and to contribute to a texture that is more complex, and which, through its use of polyphony, creates a sense of musical dialogue, adding emphasis to the repeated words (Ex. 3).

Example 3: SAGINA (original form) [audio Example 3 on journal website's page for this article]

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: "Thee will I love my strength my tow'r Thee will I love my". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef with lyrics: "Thee will I love my strength my tow'r Thee will I love my". The second system also consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: "joy my crown Thee will I love with all my pow'r In". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef with lyrics: "joy my crown Thee will I love with all my pow'r In". A piano dynamic marking (*p*) is placed above the piano staff in the second system. The score uses various musical notations including notes, rests, and bar lines to indicate the timing and structure of the music.

13

all thy works and thee a - lone. Thee will I love 'till

In all thy works

all thy works and thee a - lone. Thee will I love 'till

19

p the pure fire Fill my whole soul with chaste de - sire

the pure fire *p* Fill

Fill my whole soul with chaste de - sire

25

Fill my whole soul Fill my whole soul

my whole soul Fill my whole soul *f* Fill

Fill my whole soul Fill my whole soul with

29

Fill my whole soul with chaste de - sire.

Fill my whole soul

my whole soul with chaste de - sire.

chaste de - sire Fill my whole soul

Later nineteenth-century hymnals contain revised versions, with the principal melody in the soprano throughout, some small changes to melody and harmony, and a tendency to simplify the polyphonic texture of the second half of the tune. The version that has subsequently become standard was first published in *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal* (Ex. 4), but variants persisted after this, such as the differing versions published in *The Centenary Tune Book* and *The Gosforth Tune Book*.²⁹ Interestingly, the now-standard version has departed from Campbell's original more significantly than other late nineteenth-century versions. *The Gosforth Tune Book* retains the melodic passing notes preceding the final cadence, while *The Centenary Tune Book* retains a greater degree of rhythmic independence between the parts, preserving the distinctive delayed entry of the alto in phrases 2 and 4. Notably, both revised versions simplify the final phrases, in which lines 5 and 6 of the text are repeated. *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal* establishes a clear and consistent two-part dialogue between the soprano and the other three parts, whereas *The Centenary Tune Book* takes a similar approach for the repetition of line 5, but then pairs the voices (soprano and tenor/alto and bass) for the beginning of the repetition of line 6. Both have more musical finesse than Campbell's slightly ungainly original, and have the additional advantage of employing all four voice parts throughout this repetition, whereas Campbell wrote only for soprano, tenor, and bass in the repeat of line 5.

²⁹ Alfred Rogerson, comp., *The Centenary Tune Book: A Selection of Old Methodist Tunes* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1897); Richard Humphrey, comp., *The Gosforth Tune Book: A Collection of Old Methodist Tunes* ([Gosforth]: [], [1902]).

Example 4: SAGINA (adaptation first used in *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal*) [audio Example 4 on journal website's page for this article]

7

14

21 (Repeat lines 5 and 6)

27

While SAGINA has entered into the Methodist psyche to such an extent that it is common to hear the repetition of lines 5 and 6 sung in four-part harmony by whole congregations, who are predominantly relying on memory rather than musical notation to guide them, the existence of multiple variants points to the need for a more careful understanding of its rise to popularity. Although it is highly likely that SAGINA became associated with *And can it be* between 1825 and 1889, the establishment of a single standardized version clearly emerged over time, and was ultimately reinforced only with its inclusion in twentieth-century authorized hymnals that were either produced jointly by more than one of the branches of Methodism that had emerged in the nineteenth century, or that followed the formation of the Methodist Church of Great Britain in 1932. Claims for its authenticity as a traditional Methodist tune, while having some basis in fact, easily overlook SAGINA's complicated history and the gradual acceptance of both the tune as the default setting for *And can it be* and a standard arrangement.

Other Nineteenth-Century Settings

At least in terms of its published hymnals, nineteenth-century Methodism was not widely agreed on the most suitable tune for *And can it be*. While SAGINA's eventual acceptance suggests that its use became more widespread as the century went on, composers and hymnal editors saw fit to offer multiple different tunes, none of which endured into twentieth-century publications. Two of the most substantial denominational hymnals of the century opted for tunes in styles that were in vogue ecumenically. The Wesleyans' 1877 edition of *A Collection of Hymns*, now referred to as *Wesley's Hymns, with a New Supplement*, set it to ST CATHERINE (Ex. 5), which originated in Henri Friedrich Hemy's *The Crown of Jesus Music* (1864), an important collection of tunes for use in the Roman Catholic Church in Britain, designed to accompany the hymns in *Crown of Jesus: a complete Catholic manual of devotion, doctrine, and instruction* (1862). Although the tune has remained popular in British Methodism, its association with *And can it be* did not survive beyond this hymnal. This is unsurprising, given its gently undulating melody, heavily slurred triple-meter rhythms, and occasional affective chromatic harmony, none of which capture either the mood of wonder or, later, confidence that the text so powerfully conveys.³⁰

³⁰ Watson notes that ST CATHERINE and another tune from the same publication, STELLA, "were taken up by non-Catholics, particularly by Methodists." Hemy was based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and County Durham, both areas in which Methodism and Roman Catholicism prospered in the nineteenth century. J. R. W., "Henri Friedrich Hemy," *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/h/henri-friedrich-hemy> (accessed June 22, 2015).

Example 5: ST CATHERINE [audio Example 5 on journal website's page for this article]

And can_ it be, that I should gain An in - trest in the Sav - iour's blood?

Died he_ for me, who caused his pain? For me,_ who him to death pur - sued?

A - maz - ing love! how can it be That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Although *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal* included SAGINA as a supplementary tune, within the main body of the book, *And can it be* was set to ST PAUL by Sir John Goss (Ex. 6). Although it is a well-constructed tune, with some sense of climax fitting the final couplet, it lacks any significant distinguishing melodic or rhythmic features that might have allowed it to achieve greater popularity. Interestingly, it is also set for *Where shall my wondering soul begin?*, the text of which appears on the same page as *And can it be*. The placing of these two historically significant hymns alongside each other clearly indicates a desire to preserve and value the heritage they represent, but their setting to a new tune suggests that no strong bond between these words and a particular musical setting had formed in the collective memory of at least the Primitive Methodists. This impression is reinforced by the lack of agreement on a tune between the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists, the two largest groupings in nineteenth-century Methodism.

Example 6: ST PAUL [audio Example 6 on journal website's page for this article]



Further indication of the diversity of musical settings is given in Lancelot Middleton's *Hymns for Mission Services*. In the preface, Middleton outlines his principles in compiling the collection and selecting tunes, noting his resolve "that the book should be made to form as comprehensive a collection as its limits would allow, of the tunes which have proved themselves of such signal service in the several great popular religious movements of modern times."³¹ He prints two tunes for *And can it be*, LOUGHBOROUGH (or MARTHA), attributed to G. Griffiths, and the anonymous KIDDERMINSTER. Significantly, by the time an expanded version of the hymnal was published in 1887, the hymn had been omitted entirely, suggesting that its popularity was not widely established. Its omission is perhaps explained by a comment on the selection of tunes in the first edition: "Many choirs and congregations will welcome the re-appearance, under Methodist auspices, of the compositions of Stanley, Leach, Clark, Arnold, Phillips, etc., as being (at least from the evangelistic standpoint) unrivalled as exponents of the profoundly spiritual, intensely nervous, and soul-stirring hymns of Charles Wesley, and others of a like type."³²

The crux of Middleton's statement is the "re-appearance" of these popular tunes; the evangelistic success of Charles Wesley's hymns is shown to be heavily dependent on the tunes associated with them, presumably because the greater a tune's popularity, the more compelling

³¹ Lancelot Middleton, preface to *Hymns for Mission Services* (London: T. Woolmer, [1882]), [iv].

³² *Ibid.*, [iii].

its performance was likely to be. The composers named were prolific writers of so-called “Old Methodist Tunes,” the popularity of which is attested by Middleton’s comment. Although LOUGHBOROUGH, with its extension of the basic meter, in particular, and KIDDERMINSTER to a lesser extent, exhibit some of the characteristics of this style, their absence from other Methodist collections, and from the enlarged edition of Middleton’s collection, suggests that they were not well known and therefore not as effective as some other hymns in the collection in the mission work that it sought to support (Exx. 7 and 8).

Example 7: LOUGHBOROUGH [audio Example 7 on journal website’s page for this article]

7

14

21

p

f

Example 8: KIDDERMINSTER [audio Example 8 on journal website's page for this article]

The musical score for 'KIDDERMINSTER' is presented in a piano arrangement. It is written in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is organized into four systems, each containing a treble and bass staff. Measure numbers 7, 14, and 20 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The melody in the treble staff is simple and hymn-like, while the bass staff provides a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fourth system.

SAGINA'S growing popularity is attested by its appearance in *The Centenary Tune Book*, where it is cross-referenced to *And can it be* in the 1877 edition of *Wesley's Hymns*. Musically, *The Centenary Tune Book* adopts a similar approach to *Hymns for Mission Services*; the preface notes that "in issuing the following selection of tunes, the Compiler deems an apology unnecessary. During many years' experience as organist and choirmaster, he has often felt the need of such a book—presenting at once, in a convenient and portable form, the best and most popular old Methodist tunes in both the standard notations."³³

The compiler, Alfred Rogerson, continues in a similarly defensive tone, noting that many of the tunes are presented in newly harmonized versions by Frederic James, so that "all crudities,

³³ Alfred Rogerson, preface to *The Centenary Tune Book*, [iii].

inaccuracies, and eccentricities in harmony have been eliminated, thus removing all objections that could be raised by the most fastidious taste.”³⁴ Herein lies a tension that persists well into the twentieth century between the apparent popularity of the “Old Methodist Tunes” and their perceived lack of musical sophistication, judged by the standards of the day. This concern is arguably particularly acute with regard to SAGINA and *And can it be*. As well as the tune’s exuberant and even rumbustious character, its ability to convey the sentiments of Wesley’s text is questionable; without conscious, collective self-restraint in performance, it does not readily match Timothy Dudley-Smith’s description of the hymn’s humbly confident conclusion.³⁵

Frederic James alludes to this tension in his own introductory comments. After briefly tracing the history of Methodist musical repertoire, he describes the renewed interest in “Old Methodist Tunes,” cautiously praising their composers for their melodic inventiveness while attributing their harmonic infelicities to their amateur status. He goes on to praise “the many fine modern tunes in common use at the present time,” but cautiously argues that there is a place for the older tunes alongside them: “by a judicious use of them in our services, we, as Methodists, cannot be taking a step in the wrong direction.”³⁶

This cautious embrace of earlier Methodist repertoire and appeals to Methodism’s musical heritage mark the beginning of a shift in emphasis at the end of the nineteenth century, one which would continue to gain momentum in the twentieth century, and which, in terms of *And can it be*, would establish SAGINA’s primacy and high regard in the popular Methodist conscience.

The Twentieth Century: The Rise of a Classic and Attempted Alternatives

The 1904 *Methodist Hymn Book* included SAGINA in an appendix of “Old Methodist Tunes,” but within the main body of the hymnal, *And can it be* was set to a new tune, HOLY FAITH, composed by Sir G. C. Martin, organist of St. Paul’s Cathedral. These musical choices reflect the broader approach taken in the hymnal and indicate a tension between the rise in popularity of early nineteenth-century repertoire, noted above, and a desire to exhibit musical sophistication and taste, most notably manifested in the appointment of Sir Frederick Bridge, organist of Westminster Abbey and Gresham Professor of Music, as musical editor. On the one hand, the extensive collection of supplementary tunes, a small number of which date from the eighteenth century, but most from the early nineteenth century, points to the vogue for older tunes. Countering this, the hymnal also contains numerous new tunes composed by prominent musicians from the musical establishment, colleagues of Bridge in the worlds of cathedral music and the academy.

HOLY FAITH is characterized by lush harmonies, including frequent use of added notes such as major ninths, and successive reharmonizations of repeated melody notes (Ex. 9). Martin responds to the emphasis Wesley places on the final couplet of each verse with a passage for unison voices accompanied by colorful organ harmonies, a common technique in his hymn tunes (for example, his most enduring tune, ST HELEN), and a more subdued final line for voices in

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Dudley-Smith, “And can it be.”

³⁶ Frederic James, introduction to *The Centenary Tune Book*, viii.

harmony. Several performance directions are added in this final part of the tune in a further attempt to heighten the drama. Timothy Storey's criticism of Martin's tunes as exhibiting a "tendency to dramatic overstatement bordering at times on vulgarity" could easily have been made with this tune in mind.³⁷ There is a certain irony in this description, as new tunes such as these were written to demonstrate a musical sophistication that was perceived to be lacking in the baser, rustic style of tunes like SAGINA.

Example 9: HOLY FAITH [audio Example 9 on journal website's page for this article]

7

13

Unison **Slowly**

rall.

ff

19

Harmony

dim.

Tellingly, Martin's tune did not survive in the 1933 *Methodist Hymn Book*, the first hymnal produced by the newly formed Methodist Church of Great Britain, which also saw SAGINA set as

³⁷ Timothy Storey, "George Clement Martin," *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/g/george-clement-martin> (accessed Nov. 18, 2014).

the standard tune for the first time in an authorized Methodist hymnal. However, another new tune, LANSDOWN, was also provided as an alternative. Composed by Alfred Beer (1874–1963), a Methodist musician and schoolteacher, it is a further attempt at a close musical response to this complex and varied text, with a particular emphasis on harmonic and structural nuance (Ex. 10). Most strikingly, it begins in B minor but ends in D major, following a modulation at the end of the fifth phrase. This is a bold and highly unusual decision in terms of hymn tune composition.³⁸ Clearly designed to accentuate the role of the final couplet in each verse, it nevertheless creates a sense of interpretative and harmonic ambiguity when subjected to five iterations in the course of the whole hymn. Although the major tonality creates a sense of optimism, appropriate to the final couplet of verses 1–4, returning to the minor key to sing “No condemnation now I dread” in the final verse is somewhat counterintuitive. However, Beer may have considered this to be a minor drawback in comparison to the suitability of SAGINA’s stridency for the first four verses, which his tune was presumably composed to challenge. As if to counterbalance the tune’s shifting tonality, Beer attempts to create a sense of thematic unity by clearly recalling the tune’s opening phrase at the beginning of phrase 5. This connects the powerful final couplets of text to the opening line of each verse in a clear attempt to echo musically Wesley’s emphasis on the gradual movement of the believer from wonderment to assurance.

Example 10: LANSDOWN [audio Example 10 on journal website’s page for this article]

The musical score for 'LANSDOWN' is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The time signature is 3/2, and the key signature has one sharp (F#).
 - The first system (measures 1-8) begins in B minor. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and A4. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line.
 - The second system (measures 9-16) modulates to D major. The vocal line continues with a half note C5, followed by quarter notes B4, A4, and G4. The piano accompaniment maintains its rhythmic pattern while adjusting to the new key.
 - The third system (measures 17-24) returns to B minor. The vocal line begins with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and A4. The piano accompaniment concludes the phrase with a final cadence in B minor.

³⁸ Examples of this harmonic procedure in mainstream hymnody are extremely rare; the most widely used tune to modulate in this way is Martin Shaw’s *LITTLE CORNARD*, associated with *Hills of the north, rejoice*. The author is indebted to the Reverend Ian Howarth for highlighting this example.

Hymns & Psalms saw SAGINA's association cemented, further evidenced by the rejection of LANSDOWN and the inclusion of Cyril V. Taylor's DIDSBURY in a new attempt to provide a viable alternative tune. The tune exhibits Taylor's customary creative use of suspensions, chromatic harmony, added-note chords, and bold melodic leaps to create a highly individual yet congregationally approachable tune (Ex. 11). As a setting of *And can it be*, the prevailing minor mode has some obvious advantages, while the rich harmonies go some way to mitigate traditional associations of minor keys, which are not ideally suited to the hymn's conclusion. Specially composed for *And can it be*, melodic features such as the rising minor seventh in the penultimate line and the harmonic subtlety achieved through the careful use of dissonance indicate that Taylor's tune is a clear attempt to engage directly with the rhetorical structure of Wesley's text in a way that SAGINA does not. Watson and Trickett's description of it suggests that the relationship it sought to create with the text lay behind the decision to include it as an alternative to SAGINA: "This fine tune succeeds admirably in giving expression to the profound meaning and varying moods of Wesley's lines."³⁹

Example 11: DIDSBURY⁴⁰ [audio Example 11 on journal website's page for this article]

In *Singing the Faith* (2011), British Methodism's current authorized hymnal, SAGINA's position is all but unchallenged.⁴¹ No alternative is printed alongside it, although there is a cross-reference

³⁹ Watson and Trickett, *Companion*, 152.

⁴⁰ DIDSBURY by Cyril V. Taylor (1907–91), by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

to Erik Routley's ABINGDON, set to the hymn in the United Reformed Church's *Rejoice and Sing* and well known in association with other texts in Methodism.⁴²

The plethora of tunes associated with this hymn, the gradual rise and subsequent supremacy of SAGINA, and the reasons why the whole range of alternatives have not endured are important factors in assessing the hymn's popularity and iconic status within British Methodism. This status is explored in the final section of this paper, in which these musical settings will be brought into dialogue with the hymn's text and origins.

Ecumenical and International Reception

A brief survey of the use of *And can it be* in non-Methodist hymnals in Britain and in Methodist hymnals in other countries indicates that the iconic status it has gained is a peculiarly British Methodist phenomenon. Until the twentieth century, the hymn was little known outside Methodism in Britain, but it has recently been included in various hymnals that are either associated with particular denominations or have been commercially produced. *Rejoice and Sing*, mentioned above, is unusual in setting the text to a tune other than SAGINA, in so doing making a clear attempt to establish the hymn as part of its own tradition. The two main families of Anglican hymn books only adopted the hymn, set to SAGINA, in the twenty-first century. Its inclusion in *Common Praise* and *New English Praise* may be seen as an acknowledgment of the hymn's popularity in Methodism, and, in an era of increased ecumenical activity between the Methodist Church and the Church of England, as a representative attempt to embrace not only a significant Methodist hymn, but also to acknowledge a style of music and performance that has been closely associated with Methodism rather than Anglicanism.⁴³

Methodism in the United States was slow to adopt SAGINA, which was not included in a denominational hymnal until *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), despite two earlier twentieth-century hymnals having been published since the cementing of the relationship between words and music in Britain in 1933.⁴⁴ Prior to 1989, there was little agreement or consistency in musical setting. The hymn's American history is largely separate from its British journey: "Although Wesley's text has been in Methodist hymnals for over two hundred years, as far as USA Methodists are concerned, it was seldom sung until SAGINA was introduced in the 1960's, and then with the complaint from some as to the tune's fitness for the words and its inherit [sic] musical worth."⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Singing the Faith* (London: Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., 2011).

⁴² *Rejoice and Sing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). It features twice in both *Hymns & Psalms* and *Singing the Faith*, set to texts by Alan Gaunt and Brian Wren.

⁴³ *Common Praise: A New Edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2000); *New English Praise: A Supplement to The New English Hymnal* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2006). For example, *O for a thousand tongues to sing* has long been included in Anglican hymnals, set to a wide variety of tunes other than those with which it is associated in British Methodism.

⁴⁴ *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989).

⁴⁵ Carlton R. Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 213.

The *Gesangbuch der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche* has translations of 22 hymns by Charles Wesley, including *And can it be*.⁴⁶ Many of them are set to British tunes, including *And can it be*, although the tune selected is Henry Carey's SURREY rather than SAGINA. This suggests that the text was translated on the basis of its intrinsic qualities or historical significance, rather than through awareness of its status in contemporary British Methodism. Like ST CATHERINE, used in the 1877 Wesleyan collection, SURREY is in triple time, with a preponderance of slurred quarter notes, and similarly does not capture the vitality of the text.⁴⁷

The Making of an Iconic Hymn

A large part of the spiritual significance and popularity of *And can it be* in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British Methodism undoubtedly lies in the combination of Charles Wesley's powerful text with Thomas Campbell's memorable and vigorous tune SAGINA. The text, with its emotionally charged account of personal salvation, is obviously important; its ability to speak to the spiritual experiences of generations of Christians is testimony to Wesley's direct language and the continued evangelical emphasis on personal assurance of salvation. Musically, SAGINA's simple and robust harmony, purposeful melody, and the opportunity it provides, at least in the standard arrangement dating from 1889, for clearly delineated antiphonal singing in the final couplet all contribute to its appeal and the enthusiasm with which it is traditionally sung by Methodist congregations. However, these factors alone cannot fully explain the peculiar significance afforded to the hymn. Plenty of other hymns with strong associations between emotive texts and highly engaging tunes have gained considerable popularity within Methodism, perhaps most notably Charles Wesley's *O for a thousand tongues to sing*, set to either Thomas Phillips's LYDIA or Thomas Jarman's LYNHAM, which traditionally took pride of place as the first hymn in many authorized Methodist hymnals.

As well as the impact of words and music individually and in combination, the significance of the hymn in terms of the Wesley brothers' conversion experiences and the popular understanding of the birth of Methodism is an additional important factor. John Wesley's account of feeling his heart "strangely warmed" on May 24, 1738 occupies a privileged place in Methodist history, in which it is often popularly perceived as the moment in which Methodism was born. This, of course, masks a more complex genesis, in terms both of Wesley's own spiritual maturity and of Methodism's origins more generally, and also commonly overlooks Charles's similar experience just three days earlier. However, the recorded place of hymn singing in the immediate aftermath of these events, and the generally accepted dating of *And can it be* to this particular week, add to its allure and help to promote the hymn and the spiritual significance widely accorded to it as an authentically Methodist expression of religious commitment and spiritual assurance. Even this, though, does not mark it out as unique; as noted earlier, *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* is almost exactly contemporaneous, has the same meter, and has

⁴⁶ *Gesangbuch der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Medienwerk der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche, 2009).

⁴⁷ The choice is possibly explained by the use of SURREY for *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* in *Hymns & Psalms* and *Singing the Faith*.

at times been set to the same tunes as *And can it be*. However, it has never gained the widespread use and popularity of *And can it be*, perhaps for the reasons outlined above.

Words, music, and Methodist history all contribute to the hymn's iconic status, but it is also important to note the historical context in which its popularity grew. As illustrated above, although it has been present in Methodist hymnals since the very earliest days of the movement, the definitive version of it as a complete entity is a much more recent phenomenon, the roots of which lie in *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal*, and which really flourished in the twentieth century. The hymn thus rose to prominence at a decisive period in Methodist history, which culminated in the foundation of the Methodist Church in 1932. This particular historical context brings several additional factors to bear on the popularity of *And can it be*, alongside its internal characteristics and historical origin. Contemporary ecumenical developments in hymnology, an increasing historical consciousness within Methodism, and intra-Methodist ecumenism may all be identified as contributing factors.

The burgeoning of congregational hymnody in nineteenth-century Anglicanism and its ecumenical influence both had an impact on Methodism. Extensive use of congregational hymnody was no longer a distinguishing factor between Methodism and the Church of England; though the latter was some years behind Methodism and Dissenting traditions in establishing hymnody as a widespread practice, the huge number of hymnals published for use in Anglican churches of all liturgical persuasions in the nineteenth century is testament to the enthusiasm with which it was embraced. Furthermore, the numerical superiority of the Church of England, together with its long-established engagement of highly skilled organists and composers, inevitably meant that it was able to produce such a volume of hymnody that it could make a strong impression on the styles of hymn tune that were in vogue. This is clearly seen in Methodism's adoption of a large number of texts and tunes from nineteenth-century Anglicanism in its own hymnals in the latter part of the century.⁴⁸ Diverse musical styles, such as J. B. Dykes's chromaticism and S. S. Wesley's somewhat more austere harmonic language, were taken up in all of the major Methodist denominational hymnals.⁴⁹

A revival of interest in tunes such as SAGINA may therefore be seen as a reassertion of a more distinctively Methodist repertoire of hymnody. This connects to evidence of a developing Methodist historical consciousness in the late nineteenth century, influenced in no small part by the centenary of John Wesley's death in 1891. This combination of looking backwards and asserting a strong sense of Methodist identity in the present is indicative of Philippa Levine's remark that "paradox lay at the heart of Victorian culture and nowhere was it more apparent than in their simultaneous adulation of their own age and their reverent fascination for the past."⁵⁰ As described above, several collections of hymns and tunes were published in connection with this occasion, each asserting to reclaim Methodist musical repertoire of an earlier era. Although the

⁴⁸ As Temperley notes in a section headed "The Deluge of Hymns," "The Victorians produced a torrent of hymns and hymn tunes unequalled before or since." Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 2006), 1: 296. Citations refer to the 2006 edition.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 1: 309–10.

⁵⁰ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838–86* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

hymn texts were largely written by Charles Wesley, the tunes were typically from the early nineteenth century, revealing a selective attitude to Methodism's history of congregational song. This increasing historical consciousness manifested itself in various ways, including the publication of histories of the denomination, biographies of John Wesley, and an edition of his works. This awareness was by no means confined to Methodism; most obviously, the Oxford Movement's championing of historical liturgical practices and repertoire was a defining feature of nineteenth-century Anglicanism, but Evangelicals, too, frequently appealed to tradition in attempts to justify their approach to congregational hymnody.⁵¹ Ian Bradley notes how an appreciation of historical hymns was also evident in Victorian Christianity, commenting on the preponderance of eighteenth-century hymns chosen by the contributors to Stead's *Hymns that Have Helped* (1896), the antiquarian tendencies apparent in *The Yattendon Hymnal* (1895–99), and observations in life writing and fiction of the period.⁵² More generally, Frances Knight notes how "Tractarian historians made an early attempt to write the history of the nineteenth-century Church, but by the beginning of the twentieth century Evangelicals were also offering their distinctive interpretation, though they never quite produced histories in the same quantity as the Anglo-Catholics."⁵³

It is therefore unsurprising that hymnody, as the most popular form of Methodist religious expression, featured in this endeavor. Hymns from these publications that became popular, such as *And can it be*, set to SAGINA, were perceived as being firmly rooted in Methodist traditions. As the discussion of musical settings has shown, however, in the case of *And can it be*, despite being a central example of this type of repertoire, the foundations of this appeal to tradition are far from firm; rather than establishing a connection with a decisive moment in Methodist musical history, or representing the continuation of an unbroken musical tradition, they reveal more about late nineteenth-century Methodism's attempts to define itself in relation to its founder and popular perceptions of its practice. This accords with Levine's wider analysis of historical study in the Victorian era and its apparent malleability: "History proved a consistently popular pursuit precisely because of its seeming ability to provide a framework for justified beliefs; the action of selective memory governed the historical topics most appropriate to the institutions and ideals dominant in Victorian England."⁵⁴ Thus the combination of eighteenth-century words and a somewhat later musical setting could still be justified as representative of traditional Methodist hymnody in serving the wider project of using Methodism's past to shape its present.

As most of the major Methodist organizations moved slowly toward union in the early part of the twentieth century, historical consciousness also came to the service of ecumenical endeavor, emphasizing a common heritage in eighteenth-century evangelical zeal rather than a more recent fractious history of division and opposition. Hymnody, as a central feature of the liturgical life of all branches of Methodism, was thus an important tool in promoting unity, and it is significant

⁵¹ Temperley titles his chapter on parish music of the first half of the nineteenth century "The Rediscovery of Tradition." Temperley, *Music*, 1: 244–67.

⁵² Ian C. Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 190–219.

⁵³ Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

⁵⁴ Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, 4–5.

that a new denominational hymnal was established as a priority for the new united denomination, published just one year after the Deed of Union was signed. Heritage played an important role in this regard; the 1933 hymnal reprinted Wesley's famous preface to *A Collection of Hymns*, described by J. R. Watson as "a masterstroke: it leaped back across almost two centuries to hear the authentic words of the founder of Methodism. No-one could question that voice."⁵⁵ However, Andrew Pratt has argued that the new hymnal, particularly in terms of its literary content and structure, drew far more heavily on the Wesleyan tradition than on Primitive Methodism, which, of all the Methodist groups that flourished in the nineteenth century, had developed the most distinctively different repertoire of hymnody from its Wesleyan sibling.⁵⁶ However, Pratt's analysis is primarily focused on the textual rather than the musical approach taken in the new hymnal. Although SAGINA had only been included in the appendices of the last Primitive and Wesleyan hymnals prior to union, the Primitive hymnal predated the Wesleyan by 15 years and was responsible for the version of the tune that became definitive. Its inclusion as the standard tune for *And can it be*, the first time it had been used in this way in an authorized hymnal, therefore represents a point of musical unity, and arguably evidence of Primitive Methodist influence on Wesleyan musical repertoire.

These contextual factors, added to the textual and musical qualities of the hymn and its associations with the Wesley brothers' conversion, persuasively combine to create and sustain the iconic status of *And can it be*. It is a self-perpetuating tradition, with each use of the hymn at a prominent Methodist occasion reinforcing its place in the collective Methodist consciousness as expressive of the denomination's heritage yet still speaking to the experience of its present-day members. Furthermore, this reinforcement makes *And can it be* and SAGINA one of the most striking examples of a combination of words and music that is enduringly popular despite the disjuncture between its two constituent elements. While its popularity appears undimmed in twenty-first-century British Methodism, the successive reduction of the number of hymns by Charles Wesley in each authorized Methodist hymnal is indicative of a wider decline in the popularity of traditional metrical hymnody and the rise of other forms of congregational song. That *And can it be* is often the hymn of choice at services of local, regional, or national significance in Methodism suggests that its iconic status is likely to be preserved, yet its ubiquity also raises questions about the nature of that status. While the experience of singing this hymn can be an intense spiritual experience, its familiarity, and the enthusiastic performance that SAGINA encourages, may actually obscure close engagement with its meaning. Similarly, where it is made to be representative of traditional Methodist hymnody, it creates a risk of reducing a complex corpus of hymns to a caricature in which lusty, even triumphal singing about personal salvation overshadows texts and musical settings that seek to address the gamut of human and religious experience. Arguably, the spirit in which it has been adopted in mainstream Anglican

⁵⁵ J. R. Watson, "Music, Hymnody and the Culture of Methodism in Britain," *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. William Gibson et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 246.

⁵⁶ Andrew Pratt, *O for a Thousand Tongues: The 1933 Methodist Hymn Book in Context* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2004).

hymnals at the start of the twenty-first century reinforces the sense of the hymn as uniquely representative of Methodist spirituality and practice.

This single example points to the complex range of factors that combine to shape and reshape the status and reception of congregational hymnody. The particular history and context described here are unique to British Methodism, and, arguably, to *And can it be*. However, the consideration of textual origins and characteristics and musical qualities and practices alongside interrogation of historical, denominational, and ecumenical contexts offers a methodology of interpreting and analyzing hymns in a way that does not just acknowledge their content, but reflects their primary significance as popular expressions of religious belief and the enactment of theological and doctrinal values. *And can it be* gains its iconic status in British Methodism not merely from its text, commonly associated tune, and connection with the Wesleys' conversion experiences, but also from the impetus these factors gave to its centrality in efforts to articulate, affirm, and celebrate a sense of Methodist identity that drew on popular perceptions and cultural traditions and which connects a sense of heritage with present-day expressions of religious commitment, denominational affiliation, and personal salvation.